Reading Rumi in Sarajevo

The Mevlevi Tradition in the Balkans

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As Islam evolved from its primordial revelation through both the passage of time and the growing numbers of lands and peoples it embraced, different approaches to faith inevitably developed. One of these viewpoints was *tasawwuf*, the Sufi path, also commonly known as Islamic mysticism. Sufism was in its essence a spiritual tradition hearkening back to the days of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his early community. Yet it was a tradition that was not profusely articulated as a precise and systematized way of thought until the 9th century CE when it was compelled to define itself in relation to the diverse ideas and religious outlooks that had by then increased within the Islamic world.

The early development of Sufi thought can be traced to outstanding individuals such as Hasan al-Basrî (d. 737 CE), Rabi^{c}a al-^{c}Adawîyya (d. 801 CE) and Abû Yâzid al-Bistâmî (d. 874 CE). By the 10th century CE Sufism could be essentially divided into two contrasting schools: the "Sober" and the "God-intoxicated" school. The divergence between these two ways was not necessarily over the source and understanding of the quest for the Divine, for both recognized each others spiritual position and level of mystic attainment. Rather the point of contention between the two was over the mode with which articulation of the quest became manifest.

Corresponding to the breakdown of ^{c}Abbâsid authority during the 11th and 12th centuries CE and the fragmentation of the Muslim Middle East into various competing principalities, the approach of the "God-intoxicated" (or "Drunken") Sufis expanded in popularity. It is therefore no accident that this manner of Sufism found its ultimate, as well as its greatest and most eloquent expressions in the political and social turmoil of 13th century Anatolia, a period in which various Seljuk Turk states vied with the waning Byzantine Empire for the control of the hearts and minds of the myriad of ethnicities and religious sects in that land.

Paradoxically the political breakdown of the Islamic polity was followed by a flourishing of Sufi thought, and it was a period which could justifiably be called the golden age of Sufism. Great Sufi masters

like Farîd ud-Dîn Attâr (d. 1220 CE), Ibn ^{c}Arabî (d. 1240 CE), Haji Bektâsh Veli (d. 1271 CE), and Jalâl ud-Dîn Rûmî (d. 1273 CE) all lived during this period. Even though not all of these figures lived in Anatolia, within decades of their deaths, their wisdom and teachings became intertwined with one another's, resulting in a intellectually advanced and literarily articulate expression of the "God-intoxicated" school of Sufism, ultimately producing a solidified social, cultural, intellectual, and religious order within the broader context of the congealing of Ottoman power in Anatolia and the Balkans. With this backdrop in mind we shall now look at the spiritual method of one of these masters, Jalâl ud-Dîn Rûmî.

Jalâl ud-Dîn Rûmî & His Sufi Order

One of the greatest personalities in the history of Islamic civilization is undoubtedly the 13th century Sufi poet, mystic, and philosopher Jalâl ud-Dîn Rûmî. He was an immensely significant figure whose influence on mysticism continues to this day. He is universally known in the Muslim world as *Mevlânâ* (or *Mawlânâ*) a term that simply means "Our Master."

According to one legend (that for all we know it could be fact) when Jalâl ud-Dîn was a little child he accompanied his father on a journey, which led them through the Persian city of Nishapur, hometown of the famous Sufi poet Farîd ud-Dîn Attâr (d. 1220 CE). The then little Rûmî was walking right behind his father, Bahâ' al-Dîn Walad, holding his hand and when Attâr saw them he exclaimed, "Look! A sea is pulling an ocean behind it." Then Attâr handed the lad a copy of one of his mystical



A classic portrait of Mevlânâ Jalâl ud-Dîn Rûmî

dîvâns (poetry books). Consequently it is evident to anyone familiar with the writings of Attâr that he had great inspiration over Rûmî's thinking and poetry, regardless of whether this meeting actually occurred or not.

Rûmî was born in the Afghan city of Balkh into a family long known for Islamic scholarship. The family was compelled to migrate westwards due to the unstable political situation that had engulfed the region due to the Mongol sack of Balkh in 1220 CE. The family ultimately settled in the Anatolian city of Konya where Rûmî's father took the position of *mufti* at the invitation of the Seljuk ruler Kaykubad I (d. 1237 CE). Rûmî himself became a great theologian and teacher and his lectures attracted many students. His reputation as *ᶜalim*, scholar, spread far and wide. However one day this all changed. A wandering dervish approached him for discussion in a crowded bazaar and forever altered the direction and purpose of his life. This event lit the fire of the hidden beauty of Divine Love in Rûmî's heart. He abandoned his studies, his students, and even his family and spent all of his time in the company of this eccentric dervish, whose name was Shams-i Tabrîzî (d. 1248 CE) – the "Sun of Tabrîz." Rûmî's students and admirers became jealous of Shams, and they chased him away from their instructor with threats of arrest and violence. Rûmî was distraught over the departure of Shams and set out to find his beloved companion. He eventually found him and the two returned to Konya. Nevertheless resent once again caught hold among Rûmî's family and students and it is said that his own son ordered the dervish killed, his corpse thrown down a well. It was this ultimate parting from Shams that inspired the famous whirling Rûmî, together with the composition of immeasurable verses of poetry, conceived in this most graceful, touching and remarkable manifestation of love.

During Rûmî's lifetime a band of devoted mystic followers gathered around his feet with the intention of gaining from his remarkable spiritual insight. It was at the hands of these men, Rûmî's *khalifahs* (representatives) that a movement gradually crystallized into a Sufi order, or *tarîqat*. These *khalifahs*, Çelebî Husâm (d.1284), Sultân Walad (d. 1312) and Ulu Ârif Çelebî (d. 1320), were responsible for giving the Mevlevî Order many of its practices for which it is well known, most notably the *samâᶜ* or whirling dance.

Notwithstanding Rûmî's state of sophisticated and ecstatic mysticism, the tradition that he started fell undeniably within the bounds of normative Islam and cannot be strictly considered part of the "God-intoxicated" school of Sufism, which by the 13th century often demonstrated a candid contravention of both legal and societal custom. Indeed, his reputation as a scholar of the *sharî^cah* testifies to this. Even after his passing the Mevlevî *tarîqat* throughout its long history has been deeply attached (at least outwardly) to the precepts of orthodox Sunni Islam.

One of the most striking features of Mevlevî philosophy is the multi-layered rendering of love, both divine and temporal. Rûmî genuinely believed that love, both divine and temporal, motivated the universe into being and continued existence. One Mevlevî technique by which to reach God was to approach Him through the contemplation of the beauty of each and every entity in the cosmos. This led Rûmî's dervishes to absorb themselves in music and literature as outlets for the expression of this beauty. Such a broadminded and all-embracing philosophy has given the order wide appeal to this day. Lofty theosophical speculation that is so common in the order's literary works proves the Mevlevîs developed an extremely sophisticated spirituality. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that during the Ottoman period most of its followers and benefactors came from the educated urban elite. Mevlevî poets and writers were quite visible in the Ottoman literary scene, many often hailing from Balkan lands.

To be admitted into the ranks of the Mevlevî Order was by far no easy task. As with every Sufi *tarîqat*, a request for initiation had to be made to the head guide, the shaykh or *dede*, of a *tekke* (Sufi lodge). This was usually done through the mediation of one who was already a fully initiated member. If the aspirant was found possessing sound character and mind, the shaykh would instruct him to,

> "…bathe and appear on an appointed day. The *muhib*, that is the candidate *murid*, appears on the appointed day with a *sikke* (a type of conical hat). He kisses the shaykh's hand and then sits on his left. With the faces of both turned towards the *kibla*, the shaykh informs him that they will read together a prayer of repentance. After the prayer is read, the shaykh takes in both

> hands the *sikke* brought by the candidate *murid*, and three times- to the right, left and front of the *sikke*- reads the *sura Ikhlas* and blows upon the *sikke*. Then he settles the candidate *murid* down upon the left knee and holds the *sikke* towards the *kibla* and having stated that he is acting on behalf of the Mawlana, he kisses the *sikke* from the right, left and front and places it upon the candidate. With his hands upon the *sikke* he pronounces the *takbir*. The shaykh then caresses the back of the candidate whose head is resting upon his knee, raises him to his feet and with their right hands held together they kiss."[1]

Once this ceremony was completed the *muhib* (a term which meant "lover") then had the choice to enter into a period of 1,001 days of service to the *tekke* and become a *dede* (literally "grandfather") or remain as a layperson. If he chose the former he was put into a period of testing and training known as the *chilla* (seclusion). During the *chilla* the *muhib* was not only instructed on the methods and philosophies of the Sufi path, but he had to work in the *tekke's* kitchen and place himself at the service of its senior dervishes. The *muhib* also received training on how to perform the *samâ*ᶜ, the ritual of the whirling, as well as musical instruction. During the *chilla* the *muhib* was not permitted to leave the *tekke* grounds except to run errands. He spent his nights sleeping in one of the many small cells (*hujrah*) that were normally attached to the *tekkes*.

Following the successful completion of the 1,001 days of service, the *muhib* was prepared to undergo a final ceremony initiating him as a full-fledged dervish of the Mevlevî *tarîqat*. During the ceremony the shaykh of the *tekke* dressed him in the garb of the order and gave him permission to teach those candidates seeking entry into the *tekke*. At that time the new dervish could return to his home and everyday life if he chose to do so.

In both its complexity and symbolism only the costume of the Bektashis rivaled that worn by the Mevlevîs. On the occasion of the weekly *d͟hikr* and the *samâ*ᶜ this costume was to be worn by all dervishes in attendance. It was comprised of a black *jubbah* or robe, a long white sleeveless gown called a *tannûrah*, a tight fitting waistcoat known as a

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[1] Yazici, T, *Mawlawiyyah*, EI², vol. VI, p.883-884.

dastagul and a girdle, the *alf-î namad*. Every dervish and shaykh wore a tall conical shaped *sikkah* made from camel hair. The shaykhs of the order were allowed to wrap as muslin turban around the base of their *sikkahs*, which was a dark smoky gray for those who were *sayyids* (descendants of the Prophet). Other shaykhs wore white turbans.



Mevlevî dervishes in full garb, ca. 1890

The structure of the Mevlevî *tekke* was similar to that of the other *tarîqats* found throughout the Ottoman Empire. Larger Mevlevî establishments were known as *astânahs* or *Mevlevî-khanas* and their importance was such that the *chilla* and the initiation ceremony could only be performed in them. The *astânah* was typically comprised of a number of structures, the most important being the *samâ*^{c}*-khana*, where the ritual whirling was executed. Though varying in size layout of the *samâ*^{c}*-khana* was rather standard. For instance the following description of the *samâ*^{c}*-khana* of Thessalonica *astânah* by a German traveler at the turn of 20th century provides a description of this common layout,

> "One passes into a vast hall which shows familiar characteristics for those who have visited the *tekke* of Pera [Istanbul]: the central part of the hall is taken up by a circular polished wooden floor bordered by a low wooden balustrade; near the entrance, staircases on both the right and left sides lead up to a circular balcony of which part is reserved for the musicians who accompany the exercise [*sama'*]; another important part of the balcony is reserved for ladies who view the ceremony through a wooden lattice; the rest of the balcony is for any unbelievers who might attend..."[2]

Other buildings in the compound would likely include a small mosque (*masjid*), sitting and dining halls and the residence of the shaykh. Many *astânahs* had rooms where dervishes would copy important manuscripts such as the Qur'ân and the *Mathnawî* during their spiritual seclusions.

Less significant Mevlevî establishments were known as *zâwîyahs*. Though lesser in prestige to the larger *astânahs*, the *zâwîyahs* were nevertheless places where the *samâ*ᶜ could be performed. These establishments also provided for the common benefit of the laity. One of these *zâwîyahs s*ituated in northwestern Thessaly (Greece), was visited by the English traveler Edward Lear in the spring of 1847. He presented a brief description of the hospitality afforded to guests in the *zâwîyah*:

> "They call the dervish Dede Effendi and he is the head of a small hospitable establishment, founded by the family of Hasan Bey, who allows a considerable sum of money for the relief of poor persons passing along the ravine. The dervish is obliged to lodge and feed, during one night, as many as may apply to him for such assistance."[3]

As with the other Sufi orders, the Mevlevîs practiced a congregational *dhikr*, the ritual chanting of God's names. This exercise took on at least two forms: a conventional *dhikr* and the *samâ*ᶜ or whirling. The former would take place in the *samâ*ᶜ*-khana* with the

[2] Hartmann, M., *Der Islamischen Orient*, vol. III, Leipzig, 1910, p.11.
[3] Lear, Edward, *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania*, London, 1851.

dervishes seated on sheepskins arrayed in a circle as the shaykh sat in the *mihrâb*, the niche indicating the direction of Makkah. The recitation of various verses from the Qur'ân would commence the ritual and this would be followed by the repetitive chanting of the name "Allah". This chanting would gradually increase in pace until "the two syllables of the word 'Allah' became indistinguishable from each other and the bodies of the chanting dervishes began to sway frenziedly".[4]



Mevlevî ceremonies were most typically carried out on the Monday and Thursday evenings, days that are sacred in Islamic tradition. However on special occasions (such as in fulfillment of a vow or on certain holy days) dervishes gathered to perform a special *samâ*ᶜ known as the ᶜ*ayn-i jam*. The Mevlevî dervishes of Sarajevo, for instance, would perform a special *dhikr* with the *samâ*ᶜ in Ghâzî Khusrûw Beg's mosque on the 27th night of Ramadan following the night prayers (*salât ut-tarawîh*). This ritual differed little from the normal execution of the *samâ*ᶜ, save that it was not held in the *samâ*ᶜ*-khana*.

The *samâ*ᶜ, or whirling, is a one feature that has brought the Mevlevîs immeasurable notice. Performed in the *samâ*ᶜ*-khana* of the *tekke*, this form of Divine remembrance was quite unique among the many Sufi orders of the Muslim world. The sole purpose of the *samâ*ᶜ was to elevate its practitioner to states of ecstasy allowing a glimpse of divine joy and heightened spirituality. To the dervishes it was "an expression of the cosmic joy experienced by the simultaneous effect of annihilation and glorification."[5]

But the *samâ*ᶜ should not be mistaken for a simple rapturous dance. It was a ritual replete with great ceremony and symbolism. The intricate details of act required that each and every participant be thoroughly instructed in its procedure. Music played a key role in the

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[4] Gölpınarlı, *Mevlana'dan sonra mevlevilik*, p.411
[5] Friedlander, *op.cit.*, p.87.

*samâ*ᶜ, even more so than other Sufi orders. Without musical accompaniment the *samâ*ᶜ could not be performed. Every Mevlevî *tekke* had dervishes trained in the use of the various instruments that made up an orchestra. These were namely the "*ney, kudum, drums, violins*."[6]

Even though the public was typically allowed to view the *samâ*ᶜ, it was certainly not a ceremony that the uninitiated could participate in. After the night prayers on the appointed night of performance, the dervishes would assemble in the *samâ*ᶜ*-khana*. They would find that the *meydancı*, the one who oversees the organization of the *samâ*ᶜ*-khana*, had placed the sheepskin of the shaykh in the *mihrâb*. All of the dervishes would then take their pre-assigned seats and the orchestra would ascend to their place in the balcony. Due to the complexity of the ritual it is worth presenting it here in detail:

> "The *Mathnawihan* [Mathnawî reciter] reads an extract from the Mathnawî, while the shaykh reads his *post duasi*. They then listen to the *nat* [tribute to the Prophet] performed by the musicians and afterwards the shaykh and the *semazens* or participants, all rise, striking their hands to the ground. The shaykh, in harmony with the music of the musicians, walks very slowly to the right and once he has taken three steps from the skin, the person behind him takes up the a position near the skin and, bowing his head in salutation, passes in front of the skin to the other side without stepping on the *hatt-i isteva* and stands with his face towards the skin. The one who follows him also passes before the skin. These two participants, standing opposite one another, look at one another face to face. They then salute one another, drawing the right hand from above the left from within the *hırka* [vest] to the heart and the left hand to the right side. Next, one turns and follows the other who goes in front. All of the *cans* act in this way before the skin. Then they walk in harmony with the tempo. When the shaykh comes before the skin, he stops and finds the most senior *nevniyâz* [novice] before him. They exchange mutual salutations. Thus the first *devran*, or sequence, is completed. Second and third *devrans* follow in the same fashion. When the third *devran* is finished,

[6] *ibid.*, p.30.

> the shaykh goes towards his skin and at this moment the *ney*, or flute, improvisations begins and continues until the shaykh sits upon his skin; once he has done so, the ceremony begins. The shaykh and the *semazens* salute. The *semazens* remove their *hırkas* and place them on the ground. Then, passing the right arm over the left they link arms in a diagonal fashion, with the right hand holding the left shoulder and the left hand holding the right shoulder. The shaykh walks in front of the skin, salutes and the others perform the same movement. Next the *semazens*, setting off on the right foot, approach the shaykh one by one, salute him and kiss his hand. They then open their arms, the left hand being a little higher, take three short steps and begin to turn. The *semazen başı*, or leader of the participants, has charge of the *sema*. The first to turn is followed in identical fashion by the others. When the *selam* is to be given, the shaykh, who is beside the skin, advances and makes salutation. The *semazens* come together in twos and threes, touching each other's shoulders diagonally, and form groups. The second *devran* is then begun; this resembles the first. This time the, the *semazens* perform a salutation before the shaykh and kiss his hand. The third and the fourth *devrans* follow in the same fashion."[7]

The *samâᶜ* ceremony would end with a fourth stage at which time the dervishes would confine their whirling to the outer circle, while the shaykh himself joined in. He would make his *samâᶜ* in the very middle of the circle, symbolizing his position as representative of Mevlânâ Rûmî, who is seen as the axis of sainthood or the *qutb ul-awliyâ'*.

[7] Yazici, *op.cit.*, p. 885.

The Mevlevî Order in the Balkans

Ottoman ingenuity allowed for the systematic incorporation of the many Sufi movements found throughout the empire into the social configuration of the state. Parallel with the solidification and centralization of this powerful state, the *tarîqats* became much more systematically organized, and many of the antinomian trends within the "God-intoxicated" orders were incorporated into existing *tarîqats* (as was the case of the Bektashis). Because of the enormous popularity of the Sufi orders among the Muslim peoples of Anatolia and the Balkans the *tarîqats* served as links between the palace and its subjects. Moreover different *tarîqats* attracted different types of people. As a general rule governing elites were deeply involved with the Khalwâtîs, while the *ᶜulamâ'* were with the Naqshbandîs and the Bektâshîs the military. The Mevlevîs were known for their close affiliation with the literati although their influence could be equally felt in the halls of government. In fact the Çelebî (titular the head of the order) was given the honor of girding the new sultans with the sword of their forebear, ᶜUthmân Ghâzî, on their ascension to the throne. This close relationship with the Ottomans afforded the Mevlevîs with ample resources for the development of scholarship and fine art. Conversely it provided the elites of Ottoman society with a subtle and elegant tradition of spiritual enlightenment and the inspired expressions of these experiences.

By the time Sultan Mehmed II Fâtih conquered Bosnia in 1463, Mevlevî teachings and ritual had more or less solidified into the form that we now know and it he tradition of Rûmî had spread throughout the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans was no exception. This Sufi order contributed much to the culture of the Ottoman Balkans and it produced many great thinkers who left enduring traces not only in their European homelands but elsewhere in the empire as well. Long after the detachment of this region from the Ottoman Empire, the legacy of Mevlânâ continued to live on into the 21st century through the work of the *Mathnawî-khwâns* of Sarajevo, the interpreters of Rûmî's magnum opus, the *Mathnawî*.

It is not known when the very first Mevlevî *tekke* was established in the Balkan Peninsula, but it was certainly contemporary with the

prominence the order had achieved in Istanbul during the 17th century. By most accounts, some thirty Mevlevî *tekkes* were established in Southeastern Europe during the long years of Ottoman rule. These institutions were scattered as far and wide as Budapest and Crete even though we have no clear timeline as to when or how this occurred at its earliest stages.

We shall begin our brief survey of the Mevlevî Order in the Balkans by looking at its *tekkes* that were once found in Bosnia-Hercegovina. The most celebrated of these, found in Sarajevo's Bendbaša quarter, is still remembered to this day. It was an establishment with an extremely long history that stretched back to the days of the Ottoman conquests of the 15th century. At that time Ishaq-zadeh ᶜIsa Beg (the *sanjaq-beg* of Bosnia from 1463 to 1469) constructed a *zâwîyah* that served as a hospice for travelers as well as a kitchen for the poor and indigent. Nevertheless is not known for sure if this early structure in the Bendbaša quarter was initially attached to any Sufi order, but if it was, it most certainly was not the Mevlevîs.[8]

During the widespread diffusion of the Mevlevî Order into the Balkans during the mid-17th century CE, the Bendbaša *zâwîyah* somehow managed to pass into their hands. Shortly thereafter it appears that its growth as a center for Mevlevî-ism had become so remarkable that on his passing through Sarajevo in 1660 CE the famed traveler Evliya Çelebi (d. 1684) described the *tekke* with the following glowing words,

> "A Mevlevî *tekke* can be found on the right bank of the Miljacka River, and it is a sight as beautiful as the gardens of paradise. It is a *tekke* and a *waqf* of Jalâl ud-Dîn Rûmî. It is composed of a *samâᶜ-khanah*, a *meydan*, 78 [sic!] cells for the dervishes, a balcony where the dervishes listen to music, a public kitchen as well as an eating hall. Its shaykh, a well-cultured dervish, is one for whom Allah always answers his supplications. The master of the musicians (*neyzen başı*), Mustafa the calligrapher, possesses an extraordinary style of writing."[9]

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[8] It well may have been operated by the Naqshbandîs who had another *tekke* of similar purpose, the Iskandar Pasha, in the western suburbs of Sarajevo. This *tekke* likewise was established shortly after the conquest.
[9] Evliya Çelebi, *Siyahetmane*, (*Putopis*), trns. H. Šabanović, Sarajevo, 1979, p.10.

It is unclear as to exactly who the founding shaykh of Bendbaša *Mevlevî-khana* was, but it almost certainly is the individual Evliya Çelebi makes mention of but fails to name.[10] Our knowledge of subsequent shaykhs is much more definite, though far from complete. From the second half of the 1600's the Bendbaša *Mevlevî-khana* was presided over by ᶜAbd ul-Fattâh Dede (d. 1709). Sadly it was during the last years of this man's life that the *tekke* was destroyed during the course of the pillaging of Sarajevo by a Hapsburg army under the command of Prince Eugene in 1697.



A view of the Bendbaša Tekke (ca. 1910) in the foreground. The city of Sarajevo spreads out west into the distance.

The Bendbaša *Mevlevî-khana* was not fully restored until many years later through finances from the *waqf* properties of Ishaq-zadeh ᶜIsa Beg. It was completely renovated and expanded in 1781.[11] This

[10] Mujezinović considers it to be one Haji Mahmud Dede who died in 1650 CE while Ćehajić has it as being a much earlier Atîq Dede.
[11] The Mevlevîs apparently still continued their activities in Sarajevo given that Čehajić provides the names of four Mevlevi spiritual guides connected with the Bendbaša *Tekke*.

reconstruction was carried out by ^{c}Uthmân Dede (d.1814), a man who originally hailed from Istanbul but who came to live in Sarajevo 1780. A significant addition to the Bendbaša Mevlevî compound that was added between 1835 and 1845 was the construction of a mosque adjacent to the *tekke*. The *imam* and *khatîb* (preacher) of this mosque was a son of ^{c}Uthmân Dede, Lutfullah Khoja (d. 1860), who likewise served as shaykh of the *tekke* following his father's death. Constant renovation and restoration constantly beset the Bendbaša *Mevlevî-khana* in the mid-19th century. In 1860, a flooded Miljacka caused severe damage to the structures.

The period of Austro-Hungarian occupation (which lasted from 1878-1918) marked the final phase in the nearly three-hundred year existence of the Bendbaša *Mevlevî-khana*. The last spiritual guide of the *tekke* was Rûhî Dede, a man of great mystical accomplishment who was the son of a preceding shaykh, Mehmed Fikrî (d. 1878). Rûhî Dede presided over the *tekke* until his passing in 1924. During his time the last of the Ottoman-trained grand *muftis* of Bosnia, Džemaludin Čausević, began the teaching of Rûmî's *Mathnawî* (to be discussed below). The Mevlevî bond to Ghâzî Khusrûw Beg's mosque also became pronounced during this period and, as mentioned above, the *samâ*^{c} was performed there on numerous occasions during the month of Ramadan. This in itself is quite remarkable given the fact that it was virtually unheard of for Sufis to perform their rituals in mosques that were utilized by the general populace, but we can certainly ascribe this to Čausević's influence. Further more, the *imam* of this mosque during this time, Mustafa Efendi Učambarlić, also gave regular readings from the *Mathnawî*.

Following the death of Rûhî Dede no successor was appointed to replace him and with the dwindling number of dervishes the activities of the Bendbaša *Mevlevî-khana* ground to a halt. The building was finally forced to close in 1933. Shortly before the Second World War engulfed Yugoslavia, it was briefly reopened by a deputy (*wakîl*) of the Naqshbandî Order, Mustafa Varešanović. Following the war, the *tekke* closed in 1952 following the proscribing of all Sufi orders by the government-backed Islamic Community (*Rijaset*). The building sat unoccupied until 1957 when the city of Sarajevo razed the entire Bendbaša area (the *tekke*, mosque and graveyard included), leveled the ground and built a small

park over it, thus ending for good this once thriving institution of Islamic spirituality.

The only other *Mevlevî-khanas* noted to have existed in Bosnia-Hercegovina were purportedly located in the towns of Mostar and Konjic. Information on these structures is so meager that it would lead one to doubt their existence. That the great Bosnian littérateur who hailed from Mostar, Fawzî Mostarawî (Mostarac), was a Mevlevî is of no doubt. However there is confusion as to whether he established a *tekke* in his hometown, if he utilized an already existing *tekke* in the nearby village of Blagaj as a *Mevlevî-khana*, or if he constructed anything at all. Of the Mevlevî lodge mentioned to be found in Konjic, there is little than passing unreferenced mention in an article by Nimetullah Hafiz, again raising the question of very existence.

There were a number other more traceable Mevlevî establishments throughout the Balkans that were, like those on Bosnia, established no earlier than the late 17th century. During this century a *Mevlevî-khana* in Belgrade existed under the direction of Rajab Dede ᶜAdnî who died in 1689. What fate befell the *tekke* during the Hapsburg occupation of the city between 1688-1690 is not known and in the unlikely event that it survived or was rebuilt following the city's recapture by the Ottomans, it definitely did not endure the expulsion of the city's Muslim population in 1867. Of the *tekke* that was mentioned to have been located in Niš even less is known, although its spiritual director in 1882 was a certain Mehmed Dede. Another *Mevlevî-khana*, located in the town of Peć, was established in the 18th century through the *waqf* of Khudâverdi Pasha. This Kosovan *tekke* functioned until the years shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War.

In Ottoman Hungary a *Mevlevî-khana* was established in the town of Pécs. This *tekke* was built with an endowment made by Ghâzî Hasan Pasha Yakovalı sometime in the 1660's. It was closed down and its dervishes evicted a number of years after its establishment when it fell victim to the infamous anti-Sufi Qâdîzadeh policies of the Porte. The son of Hasan Pasha later restored the *tekke* to the order and in 1680 a certain Mahmûd Dede was appointed to head it. The successor of Mahmûd Dede, the noteworthy Peçevi Arifî Ahmad Dede (d. 1724), had little time to preside over this Sufi lodge. With the impending capture of Pécs by the Hapsburgs, he fled the city along with the throngs of Muslim

refugees who were being driven before the advancing invaders. Ahmad Dede eventually took up the position of shaykh in the *Mevlevî-khana* of Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

The *tekke* of Plovdiv (Filibe) was itself established during the great wave of Mevlevî implantation into the Balkans during the 17^{th} century by Ibrahim Dede Efendi. When Evliya Çelebi visited it in 1654, the *Mevlevî-khana* was under the leadership of Âghâzadeh Dede. This spiritual guide was a man of considerable charisma who engendered veneration in the local folk, both Muslim and Christian, and Evliya Çelebi claimed to have personally witnessed a display of his *karâmat*, his miraculous powers. The Plovdiv *Mevlevî-khana* continued to function unabated through the 18^{th} and 19^{th} centuries and it appears to have only stopped operating in the years following the First World War. In 1882 the head of the *tekke* was Hafiz ^{c}Ali Dede.

Another important and long-lasting Balkan *Mevlevî-khana* was found in the *mahallah*, or neighborhood, of Kâtib Shâhin in the city of Skopje. Established during the 1650's, the original structure is reported to have been a gift from a certain Malak Ahmad Pasha to his Mevlevî spiritual guide, Hasan Dede. The role of this center in the early development of the Mevlevî *tarîqat* in the Balkans is unknown at this point but its activities must have certainly disrupted by the burning of the city by a Hapsburg army under General Piccolomini in 1689. During the later half of the 19^{th} century, the *Mevlevî-khana* of Skopje achieved a degree of recognition by the Ottoman court and both sultans ^{c}Abd ul-Majîd (d. 1861) and ^{c}Abd ul-^{c}Azîz (d. 1876) presented financial contributions to the then shaykh of the *tekke*, Niyâzî Dede. In 1909 Sultan Mehmed Rashad (d. 1918) likewise donated a considerable sum of money for its refurbishment. As a gesture of appreciation, the shaykh of the *tekke,* Mehmed ^{c}Ali Dede, traveled to greet his majesty during a royal visit to Thessalonica in 1911.

The *Mevlevî-khana* of Skopje operated through the tumultuous decades of war and strife that engulfed the region during the Balkan and the First World Wars. The director of the *tekke* during this time, Ismâ^{c}îl Dede, managed to maintain a close relationship with the few remaining Mevlevî dervishes of the Bendbaša *Mevlevî-khana* until his death. His *Mevlevî-khana* continued to function despite the closure of all Sufi lodges in Turkey in 1925 paralleled with the general decline of Islamic culture in

the Balkans. The *tekke's* final shaykh, ᶜAli Hakkî Dede, had some twenty dervishes under his direction in 1940, but the lodge ceased its activities following a destructive fire in 1945.[12] Ten years later, ᶜAli Hakkî Dede migrated to Turkey during the great exodus of Muslims from Yugoslavia. He died in 1978. ᶜAli Hakkî Dede was the last shaykh to have presided over a Balkan *Mevlevî-khana*.[13]

Another Mevlevî establishment was found in the small Macedonian town of Kriva Palanka near the border with Bulgaria. Little is known about this structure and it was almost certainly only a *zâwîyah* of modest size. Given its proximity to Skopje it must have had a close relationship with that larger establishment. Nevertheless the *tekke* was destroyed by Bulgarian soldiers during the Balkan Wars (1912-13). Mention has been made of a *Mevlevî-khana* in the town of Bitola (Manastir) in southern Macedonia, although limited information on it has been found apart from mention that it was built through the patronage of the local aristocracy.

There was only one known Mevlevî center in Albania proper: the *zâwîyah* of ᶜAli Dede in the city of Elbasan. A *waqf* document recently discovered by Nathalie Clayer which was dated at 1796 presented a feeling that it was fully operative at that time and that it maintained close relations to the central *astânah* of Konya. However what became of this *zâwîyah* once Ottoman rule over Albania came to an end is not known, as there is no information regarding it after 1912.

One of the finest examples of a Mevlevî *astânah* found in the Balkans was located in the city of Thessalonica, Greece. Located on the outskirts of that city, this *Mevlevî-khana* was the earliest known to have been established in the peninsula. It was constructed in 1615 at the behest of the Ottoman notable Etmekçizade Ahmad Pasha (d. 1617). The first spiritual guide of the *tekke* was ᶜAbd ul-Karîm Dede who, according to legend, miraculously rescued the abovementioned pasha from the grave side effects of malicious slander, and in return the pasha had the *tekke* built as an offering.

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[12] The exact cause of this fire is still unknown. A school was built over the site in the 1960's.

[13] Ali Hakkı Dede continued to teach Sufism while living in Turkey and one of his dervishes, Hasan Çikar (who was born in Skopje), regularly conducts the *samâᶜ* in the Galata *Mevlevi-khana* of Istanbul.

The *Mevlevî-khana* of Thessalonica served as a point for the diffusion of the order into other regions of the empire. Several of its spiritual guides, or *dedes,* went on to either found or direct other *tekkes* in the Balkans and the Middle East. Its own shaykhs continued to direct the *tekke* uninterrupted until the population exchanges between Turkey and Greece in 1923 when all the Muslim inhabitants of the city were expelled. The last shaykh of the *tekke* was Âshraf Dede, whose family had a long relationship with the Mevlevîs.[14]



Âshraf Dede of the Thessalonica *Mevlevî-khana*

The Thessalonica *Mevlevî-khana* was admired for its physical layout. Located on the gentle slopes of Mount St. Paul, the *tekke* contained several buildings enclosed within a stone wall. The main building was the *samâ^c-khana*, which in this case was one of the most exquisite in the Balkans. Along with its kitchens, dervish cells, shaykh's quarters and guest hostels, the *Mevlevî-khana* provided an extraordinary setting for spiritual reflection, for within its walls there were,

> "… also cool, shady cloisters and raised terraces and kiosks, commanding magnificent views of mountain, plain and sea. And here, when the evening shadows are lengthening, the mystics, in their picturesque and symbolic attire, may be seen pacing tranquilly to and fro; or seated on the broad wooden benches, meditatively passing through their fingers the brown beads of their long *tesbehs*, or rosaries, on their faces that expression of perfect repose which indifference to the world and its doings alone can give."[15]

Another *Mevlevî-khana* was found some 45 miles to the northeast of Thessalonica in the town of Serres. This lodge was established as a

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[14] Not surprisingly (given the wanton neglect and disrespect for Islamic cultural monuments by the Greek government), the *tekke* no longer stands. It was leveled to the ground in 1929.

[15] Garnett, L., *Mysticism and Magic in Turkey*, London, 1912, p.66.

direct result of the activities of the Thessalonica *astânah*. This *Mevlevî-khana* was established in the early decades of the seventeenth century by Ramadân Dede, who was both student and successor (*khalîfah*) of abovementioned ᶜAbd ul-Karîm Dede. It was a relatively well-resourced institution that was funded from the long-established *waqf* of Çandarlızâde Ali Pasha.

After the death of ᶜAbd ul-Karîm Dede, the *Mevlevî-khana* of Serres was placed under the direction of the aforesaid Rajab Dede ᶜAdnî (d. 1689), who designated Rahmatullah Dede as his successor before leaving to take over the *tekke* of Belgrade. Several other notable shaykhs of the *Mevlevî-khana* of Serres were also well traveled and had directed other institutions during their lifetimes. Rahmatullah Dede, for instance, afterward left Serres for Skopje and then left there to assume the headship of a *Mevlevî-khana* in Gallipoli. Talibî Hasan Dede İştipli (d.1718) had likewise sat as head of Mevlevî *tekkes* in Thessalonica and Cairo before assuming the directorship of the Serres *Mevlevî-khana*

This feature of the well-traveled Mevlevî shaykh came to an end during the second half of the 18th century when the leadership position of the Serres *Mevlevî-khana* became hereditary. The descendants of Haji ᶜUthmân Dede (d. 1795) held the position as heads of the *tekke* until it was shut down in 1923.



Nazîf Dede of the Larissa *Mevlevî-khana*

The particulars regarding other *Mevlevî-khanas* in Greek Macedonia and Thessaly have yet to be revealed. But there were at least three other *Mevlevî-khanas* in these two regions, the oldest found some 50 miles to the northwest of Thessalonica in the town of Edessa. This *Mevlevî-khana* was in all probability built during the 18th century and in all probability ceased operation with the collapse of Ottoman rule in 1912. Further south, a *Mevlevî-khana* was built in the town of Larissa (Yenişehir) by Nazîf Dede Efendi, who later left to become head of Bahariye *Tekke* in Istanbul. Following the destruction of the Janissaries and the suppression of the Bektashi Order in 1826, two of their *tekkes* in Thessaly were handed over to the Mevlevîs by the

Ottoman government. The first, located in the hills between Farsala and Volos, was purportedly founded by Bali Baba sometime in the 1630s. As to its activities during the Mevlevî occupancy, little is known but the structure was burnt to the ground by Greek soldiers during the 1897 war with Turkey. Another Bektashi *tekke*, that of Hasan Baba, was also handed over to the Mevlevîs in 1826. It was found at western mouth of the valley of Tempe, just north of Larissa.

The Mathnawî – Translation & Interpretation

Rûmî's magnum opus, the *Mathnawî*, is indisputably one of the finest masterpieces of Islamic literature that ever been written. It is a six-volume work, written in Persian, consisting of approximately 26,000 verses. The position of this work within the Mevlevî Order is of the foremost magnitude. "It is without doubt," stated Fejzullah ef. Hadžibajrić, "that there can be no Mevlevî *tekke* without the *ney* [reed flute] and the *Mathnawî*."[16] In his masterwork Rûmî spins images with deeply symbolic, mystical, and spiritual messages, all combined into one immense narrative revealing to its student the numinous enigma of Divine Love. The famous Sufi poet [c]Abd ur-Rahmân Jâmî (d. 1492) once said of the *Mathnawî*, "it is the Qur'ân in the Persian tongue." Rûmî himself best expressed the purpose of his *Mathnawî* in the preface of its first volume:

> "This is the book of the *Mathnawî*, and it is the roots of the roots of the roots of the Religion in regard to unveiling the secrets of obtaining connection [with God] and certainty [of the Truth] … The righteous ones eat and drink in it, and the [spiritually] free ones rejoice and delight in it…. it is the remedy for hearts, the brightening polish for sorrows, the revealer of [the meanings of] the Qur'ân, the opportunity for [finding spiritual] riches, and the purifying of [bad] natures and dispositions."[17]

[16] Hadžibajrić, Fejzullah. "Iz posljednih dana života mevlevijske tekije u Sarajevu (1462-1957)". *Šebi-Arus.* Sarajevo, 1974 p. 34.

[17] Footnote 6, in "Rumi and the Sufi Traditon," by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in *The Scholar and the Saint*, edited by P.J. Chelkowski, 1975

Interestingly enough, one recent scholar demonstrated that some 6,000 verses from Rûmî's *Mathnawî* and *Diwân* are nearly direct translations of Qur'ânic verses into Persian poetry.

It is quite astonishing that a 13th century Persian-speaking Anatolian Sufi poet has become one of the best-selling poets in America since the 1990s. Rûmî has been proclaimed personality of the year for 2007 by UNESCO. Most of this publicity is the result the efforts by modern authors and poets who have translated Rûmî's works into the English and other Western languages. Foremost amongst these translators is the poet Coleman Barks, who has rendered Rûmî's poetry into free verse, communicating a contemporary feel for Rûmî's poetry to American society.

Nonetheless, this "free verse" approach to Rûmî's poetry is something new and unusual. Unfortunately much of the context of the poetry itself is lost and this aspect has produced serious deficiencies in this new approach. As it has become trendy to translate Rûmî these days (and also profitable), the qualifications which were absolutely necessary to explicate his works in the past have been thrust aside by many of these translators, many of whom do not even speak Persian. In spite of that their efforts have brought Rûmî's teachings to the thirsty souls throughout the Western world and this must be appreciated.

The Mathnawî-khwâns of Sarajevo

The traditional translators and interpreters of the *Mathnawî* are known as the *Mathnawî-khwâns*, or "*Mathnawî* reciters." To gain this title required one to obtain a written certificate, an *ijâzatnamah*, issued an already a recognized *Mathnawî-khwân* attesting that the individual was proficient enough to interpret the *Mathnawî.* This was not a difficult license to obtain, but it carried great weight nonetheless:

> "Receiving a written certificate was required for the teaching of the Mathnawî. But for this task there was no urgency, since the Mathnawî reader could read the six books of the Mathnawî. Anyone who was familiar with Persian, or knew it, and had the temperament for Persian books, (and) had participated in Mathnawî lessons for a while-- and if there

> were no such (readers) among the Mevlevîs -- a written certificate would be given to him. And the Çelebî or any other Mevlevî shaykh would recite the *takbîr* over his *sikkah*, and permission would be granted to him to wrap a turban around it."[18]

It was thus necessary to study as an apprentice of a *Mathnawî-khwân*, a concept quite customary in traditional education systems but increasingly discarded in modern civilization.

The two foremost requirements that a *Mathnawî-khwân* needed to receive his *ijâzatnamah* was a command of classical Persian and a mastery of the intricate concepts of Sufi though. The former was imperative since Sufi texts in general and Rûmî's poetry in particular were written as guideposts for spiritual seekers and they cannot be fully understood outside of that context. This turns out to be very clear once one looks at the broader tradition of Islamic mysticism and how it functions. The most fundamental concept in Sufism is the need for a guide while one is traveling the spiritual path. An aspirant had to give complete and total obedience to his or her *murshid*, or guide. At the introductory levels spiritual knowledge was not always evident. According to the majority of Sufis, this knowledge consisted of two forms: the manifest (*zâhir*) and the hidden (*bâtin*). Unleashing the hidden required someone who already knew what to look for. And this is the approach that Rûmî took. How could anyone imagine that a figure like him, born and raised in the Sufi milieu, would overtly reveal all of his knowledge in a text? Consequently the *Mathnawî* is an assemblage of allegorical stories that often carry truths in the form of figurative meanings, and without understanding the Sufi context, it would be impossible to extract this hidden knowledge that is embedded within the text.

The *Mathnawî-khwân* tradition during the Ottoman period was something quite celebrated. Nevertheless historical events have managed to overwhelm this literary art form, making the *Mathnawî-khwâns* something of an idiosyncrasy. In Turkey there are individuals scattered here and there who have been trained in this skill, but in the Balkans it

[18] Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Mevlana'dan Sonra Mevlevilik*, İnkılap Kitabevi, Istanbul, 1983

has all but vanished. Yet the closing down of the magnificent Bendbaša *Tekke* and its eventual destruction in 1957 did not spell the end of Rûmî's tradition in the Balkans, for it is a tradition that lives on to this day through the efforts of one man, Hafiz Halid Hadžimulić. It must be observed that he is not a derivative of the emptiness formed by the destruction of the Sarajevo's *Mevlevî-khana*, but rather he is part of a tradition that existed parallel to it.

A number of the spiritual guides of the Bendbaša *Tekke* were *Mathnawi-khwâns* in their own right and gave regular lessons on the text, with the last passing away in 1924. We know that the oldest mention *Mathnawî-khwân* living in Sarajevo was Tawakkulî Dede who lived during the first half of the 17th century. He was both student and successor of Atîq Dede. Shaykh ᶜAbd ul-Fattâh Dede, who died in 1709, was also known for being an accomplished commentator of the *Mathnawî*.

However Sarajevo's *Mathnawî-khwâns* were not limited to the shaykhs of the Bendbaša *Mevlevî-khana*, and some did not even belong to the Mevlevî *tarîqat*. One of these was Isaoğlu Mehmed Amin, a member of scholarly pedigree, who was not known to belong to any *tarikat*, but nonetheless gave lessons from the *Mathnawî* for years in the Baqir Baba mosque near the *Atmeydan* in Sarajevo. As mentioned above, the *Mathnawî* was also expounded by Mustafa Učambarlić during the 1860s. He was likewise an individual with no known formal *tarîqat* affiliation.

The tumultuous events that followed the collapse of Ottoman rule over Bosnia failed to completely eradicate the study of the *Mathnawî*. Over the course of the 20th century there have been four distinguished Bosnian *Mathnawî-khwâns*: Džemaludin Čaušević (1870-1938), Mustafa Merhemić (1877-1959), Fejzullah Hadžibajrić (1913-1990), and Halid Hadžimulić (b. 1913). Each of these men was *madrasah*-trained, intellectuals of the highest caliber, and renowned as spiritual masters. They also were the products of Ottoman culture, directly or indirectly, and they conveyed long-established Islamic customs to new generations of Bosnians who knew an Islam shaped by modernism, and Islam often devoid of tradition. These four men assembled around themselves prominent individuals from the spiritual and intellectual circles that all came to hear weekly lessons on the unfathomable wisdom of Rûmî.



Džemaludin ef. Čaušević

Mehmed Džemaludin Čaušević, one of Bosnia's finest post-Ottoman thinkers, was born in 1870 in the northwestern Bosnian town of Bosanska Krupa. His earliest education was obtained at the hands of his father, Ali Hodža, a member of the local Islamic clergy. Owing to his superior intellectual aptitude Čaušević was sent to Istanbul at the age of seventeen to receive a higher education. While there he finished his education in Islamic studies with outstanding marks and subsequently enrolled in the empire's celebrated law school, the *Maktab-î Huqûq*. Moreover while living in the imperial city he entered into the world of Sufism at the hand of the renowned Mevlevî master Mehmed Esad Dede, who was then shaykh of the Kasımpaşa *Mevlevî-khana*. Under his guidance Čaušević studied not only mysticism, but the Persian language and Persian Sufi classics, including the *Mathnawî*.

In 1901 Čaušević returned to his native Bosnia and within two years of his homecoming he was given a position in the *Majlis ul-ᶜUlamâ'* (Bosnia's official Islamic religious establishment). His reputation for dedication to the faith and intellectual distinction soon spread throughout the land, and in 1914 he was chosen to be the *ra'is ul-ᶜulamâ'* (head religious scholar) of all Bosnia and Hercegovina. Despite the claims of several current researchers that Čaušević was, like so many of the progressive Islamic theologians of his day, anti-Sufi, he never deserted his attachment to this mystical aspect of Islam.

While a member of the *Majlis ul-ᶜUlamâ'* Čaušević took on the role of a *Mathnawî-khwân*, translating and interpreting the *Mathnawî* in the Bendbaša *Mevlevî-khana*, no small act in itself given that he was not even a Mevlevî shaykh. But it is hardly surprising that he was given the honorary position. Čaušević arrived in Sarajevo a bright and aspiring man (only 31 at the time), who carried an education in Islamic law and theology from the top schools in the empire. He also spent several years studying Sufism under one of the most celebrated Mevlevî guides of his time, Mehmed Esad Dede. He was a figure clearly appreciated by the Mevlevî community in Sarajevo and during his inauguration as *ra'is*

ul-ᶜulamâ' the Mevlevî orchestra under the direction of Rûhî Dede played on the veranda of the Careva Mosque in admiration of their esteemed *Mathnawî-khwân*.

For reasons unknown at this time Čaušević transferred his *Mathnawî* lessons from the *tekke* to the home of Mustafa Merhemić during the First World War. These lectures continued at Merhemić's home until the middle of 1928. Čaušević's gatherings were highly appreciated by those in attendance, given his depth of knowledge and understanding of Sufism that were revealed in his translation and interpretation of the *Mathnawî*. At times he would spend an entire lesson to explain no more than one or two verses.

Personal reasons caused Džemaludin Čaušević to cease giving these lessons in 1928 and two years later he resigned from his position as *ra'is ul-ᶜulamâ'* primarily due to his wrangling with the Serb-dominated government over the administration of *waqf* properties in Yugoslavia. Following his retirement in 1930, he continued to be an active participant in Islamic intellectual discourse through contributions to literary journals, some of which he himself established. On March 28, 1938 Džemaludin Čaušević, a man widely regarded as a symbol of hope for the advancement of the Bosnian people, departed his beloved homeland for the final abode. He was succeeded as *Mathnawî-khwân* by Mustafa Merhemić.

Hadži Mustafa "Mujaga" Merhemić was born in the city of Sarajevo in 1877. He attended the *madrasah* which his family had established in the city generations beforehand, where he attended sessions given on *fiqh*, Arabic, Turkish, as well as Persian. His instructor was Mustafa Âghâ Hadžihalilović, who was seen as the most outstanding scholar of *Sharîᶜat* in Bosnia in his day. Merhemić was a deeply religious child and at the age of sixteen he went with his mother to perform the *Hajj* to Makkah. On their return from the sacred city, his mother died in Turkey and as a result he spent a year there, moving among the circles of scholars in pursuit of religious knowledge. During this time, Merhemić also visited Rumi's *turbah* (sepulcher) in Konya and it was there that he developed an attraction to Sufism.

Merhemić's love of sacred knowledge can best be illustrated by the fact that he refurbished part of his home in Sarajevo to serve as a meeting place, or *dars-khana,* for renowned *ᶜalims* (theologians) to give

tafsîrs, exegetical lectures on the Qur'ân. He was also a man acquainted with the Persian language, and he had a great affinity for classical Persian literature. His contribution to Bosnian Sufi culture was extensive, barely with precedent. Merhemić took on the enormous task of translating and interpreting the *Pandnamah* (Book of Council) of the great Farîd ud-Dîn Attâr, a feat he completed to the satisfaction of all those who attended the lessons. The next work that Merhemić translated and interpreted was Sadi's *Gulistân*, which was also successfully completed. These two Persian works were soon followed by translations of the celebrated *Dîwân* of Hâfiz Shîrâzî, Sadi's *Bustân*, and the *Bahâristan* of ᶜAbd ur-Rahmân Jâmî.

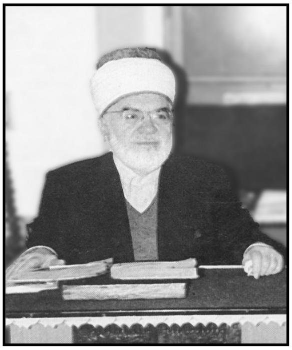
As mentioned above, in 1915 Merhemić invited Džemaludin Čaušević to give lessons on the *Mathnawî* in his home, in the so-called *dars-khana*, in which many gathered to listen to the translations and interpretations given by either of the two men. After thirteen years Čaušević stopped and for the next fourteen years talk of the *Mathnawî* was mute. Eventually members of the Muslim community succeeded in convincing Merhemić to resuscitate the lessons on this work and assume the role of *Mathnawi-khwân*, which he did during the dark days of the Second World War. But the interruption had been long, and many of the older *Mathnawî* lovers had passed away. Yet those who were still alive, in addition to a generation of newcomers (among whom were Fejzullah Hadžibajrić and Halid Hadžimulić) joined the lessons in Merhemić's house.

Merhemić completed all six volumes of the *Mathnawî* after sixteen years of lessons, and in 1958 he began his second cycle of translation, this time intending to devote more time to commentary. However this was an act not meant to be for he passed away the following year. He bequeathed the continuation of these sessions to Fejzullah Hadžibajrić as an *amânah*, a sacred trust.

Fejzullah Hadžibajrić was born in the city of Sarajevo on January 12, 1913. At the age of twenty he graduated from the Ghâzî Khusrûw Beg *Madrasah*. He completed his higher religious education under the *mudarris* and director of the celebrated *madrasah*, and received an *ijâzanâma* in *fiqh* in 1933. Having completed this initial learning Hadžibajrić went on to graduate from Sarajevo's School of Philosophy/Department of Oriental Philology where he ranked among

its top students. In 1943 he was appointed to be a member of the *Majlis ul-ᶜUlamâ'* of the Axis-occupied Bosnia-Hercegovina. During this time he served as head librarian for the Ghâzî Khusrûw Beg library, then of the Veterinary University, and finally of the School of Philosophy. Furthermore, Hadžibajrić was employed as a teacher, first at the Niža Okružna *Madrasah*, and then at the Ghâzî Khusrûw Beg *Madrasah* until 1949. From 1934 until his death, he also served as imam in several Sarajevan mosques.

Unlike his two predecessors Hadžibajrić was openly affiliated with several *tarîqats* and was a certified Sufi shaykh. In 1939 took the oath of allegiance (*bayᶜah*) into the Qâdirî Order at the hand of Shaykh Sami Yashari (d. 1951) of Vučitrn, Kosovo. In 1965 he was given an *ijâzanâma* for shaykhood in the Qâdirî Order by the famed Muhyiddin Ansari Erzincani (d. 1978) of Istanbul. Hadžibajrić also received a *khilâfatnâma* (license of deputyship) from Sayyid Yûsuf Jilanî of the Qadiri *tekke* of Baghdad. Hadžibajrić also became an honorary (*tabarrukân*) shaykh in the Rifâᶜî, Naqshbandî, Mevlevî, Badawî, and Shâdhilî *tarîqats*.



Fejzullah ef. Hadžibajrić

In the 1970s and 1980s Hadžibajrić supervised the functioning of the famed Haji Sinân (Silâhdâr Mustafa Pasha) Qâdirî *tekke* of Sarajevo. Under his direction the *tekke* became one of the leading centers of Islamic spirituality in Bosnia and Yugoslavia. During this entire time Hadžibajrić was actively involved in Sufi activities and his efforts helped re-legitimize it since it was officially discouraged in Bosnia since 1952. Finally in 1974, along with Shaykh Xhemali Shehu (1926-2004) of Kosovo, he initiated the *Community of Islamic Dervish Orders of Yugoslavia* (ZIDRA) which was created as an umbrella organization to advance the study and practice of Sufism. Through this association Sufism and its role in traditional Bosnian Islam as well as culture was given significant notice in periodicals and journals, further accentuating the genuineness of Sufism as an articulation of Islamic spirituality.

Among the activities that were organized in the Haji Sinân *Tekke* under Hadžibajrić's direction were the regular lectures given by him on the *Mathnawî*. In 1965 and in 1966 Hadžibajrić traveled to Turkey, and visited, among other places Rûmî's *turbah* in Konya. He also met with the premier Turkish scholar of Sufism during that time, Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı (1890-1982), who was an expert on the Mevlevî Order. Gölpınarlı was happy to discover that the *Mathnawi-khwân* tradition was still alive in Sarajevo, and he encouraged Hadžibajrić to preserve it. "In concurrence with Mevlevî teachings," writes Hadžibajrić, "Gölpınarlı gave me his blessing to translate and interpret the *Mathnawî*. For me this was not only an honor, but a duty."[19] Hadžibajrić began *Mathnawî* lessons shortly after his return to Bosnia.

Fortunately for us Hadžibajrić's talks were recorded by one of the attendees of the lectures, Abdullah Fočak (d. 1991), and later typed up. Initially the lessons were held in Hadžibajrić's home, and then moved to Ahmedaga Fočak's house, and finally, in 1969, to a room in the Hadži Sinan *Tekke*. Over time this room came to be known as the *Mathnawî Katedra*, the "*Mathnawî* Pulpit." Within the first five yeas all the lectures on the first volume of the *Mathnawî* were completed. Two years later Hadžibajrić began the second volume and by 1980 this part was concluded. He soon after began the third volume, but never finished it due to ill health. Hadžibajrić's translations of the first two volumes were at this time prepared for print and in 1985 volume one of the *Mathnawî* was published and two years later volume two was made available. Hadžibajrić remarked on his method of translation in the preface to the first volume:

> "Oral translation is not always equivalent to written translation. With oral translation the translator adjusts himself to the listeners, to their level of education. The *Mathnawî* is one of the most important and greatest pieces of Sufi thought and ethics. It is filled with allegories which make literal translation difficult. I concentrated on these allegorical meanings in them lie the subtlety of Sufism."[20]

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[19] Hadžibajrić, Fejzullah. "Obavijest o našem prevodu Mesnevije." p. VI-VII

[20] Hadžibajrić, Fejzullah. "Obavijest o našem prevodu Mesnevije." *Mesnevija* I. Sarajevo, 1996. p. VII

In addition to these translations Hadžibajrić made other major contribution to the manifestation of the Mevlevî legacy in Sarajevo. Starting in 1957 a conference, the *Shab-i ᶜArûs* festivals that marked the anniversary of Rûmî's death, was held every year thereafter on December 17th and these meetings continued until 1989. The setting was different every year, moving from the house of Merhemić in 1957 to different Sarajevan mosques and *tekkes*. The chief coordinator of these conferences was Hadžibajrić himself, but he continuously relied on the assistance of Halid Hadžimulić and other reliable members of his extraordinary circle of *Mathnawî* enthusiasts.[21]

Having devoted his entire life to Islam and Sufism it was only fitting for Fejzullah Hadžibajrić have left this world on the night of *Laylat ul-Qadr* in the month of Ramadan (April 22st 1990), the most sacred night in the Islamic year. His departure left a great emptiness within the Bosnian Muslim community. Nonetheless his successor, Halid Hadžimulić, was at hand to pick up the work.



Hadži Hafiz
Halid ef. Hadžimulić

Halid Hadžimulić, or "Hadži Hafiz" as he is affectionately known throughout Sarajevo, was born in that city in 1913 into a family renowned for its religiosity. Both his father and mother had committed the Qur'ân to memory in their lifetimes, something the young Halid did as well, gaining the title of "*hafîz*". In his youth Hadžimulić attended the University of Philosophy (Department of Oriental Studies) in Zagreb. He also graduated from the Ghâzî Khusrûw Beg *Madrasah*. After completing his education, he was employed as a librarian in the aforementioned *madrasah's* library while at the same time he began giving lessons Qur'ân memorization (*hifz*). Due to his outstanding qualifications and reputation for personal piety, Hadžimulić was appointed *imam* of the Farhâdî Mosque in 1967, and a year later he became the *imam* of the illustrious Hunkâr (Careva) Mosque where he remains to this day.

[21] The *Tarikatski Centar* published the lectures from these gatherings every year as a small booklet.

From 1950 until 1959 Hadžimulić, together with his close companion, Fejzullah Hadžibajrić, attended the *Mathnawî* lessons given by Merhemić, and it was here that he learned the art of the *Mathnawî-khwân*. When Hadžibajrić took over the lessons from Merhemić, Hadžimulić gave him full support and cooperation in organizing all related functions. When Hadžibajrić became too weak from illness to continue with the lessons, he left the *Mathnawî-khwân* tradition as an *amânah* to Halid Hadžimulić in 1984. Hadžibajrić wrote this explicitly in the preface of the second volume of his *Mathnawî* translation: "Regarding the next *Mathnawî-khwân* of Sarajevo, I shall be succeeded by Hadži Hafiz Halid Hadžimulić."[22]

Halid Hadžimulić, referred to as a "walking *Mathnawî*" by his students, undertook this noble tradition devotedly, and began to give *Mathnawî* lessons in the small Naqshbandî *tekke* in the Mlini neighborhood. These meetings continued until war broke out in 1992 when Hadžimulić discontinued with the lessons due to the perilous conditions brought about by the siege of Sarajevo. However this pause extended well past the end of the war and it was only in 2004 that he reassumed his role as *Mathnawî-khwân* and began once more to give lessons, this time in his own house. Halid Hadžimulić still lives in Sarajevo, where he continues to instruct others on that endless jewel mine, the *Mathnawî*, despite his remarkable age of 92.

Džemaludin Čaušević took roughly twenty years (1908-1928) to complete the first volume of the *Mathnawî* and begin the second. Mustafa Merhemić took sixteen years (1942-1958) to complete all six volumes, and Fejzullah Hadžibajrić took fourteen years to complete only the first two volumes (1966-1980). When taking into account these vastly differing time intervals one needs consider that the circumstances in which these men had to lecture in greatly affected the progress of their work. For instance, the process was much slower with some because of the time spent explaining only a few verses, as was the case with Čaušević. We also need to keep in mind that these *Mathnawî-khwâns* also had other, more pressing obligations which periodically superseded the *Mathnawî* lessons. Nevertheless, the accomplishments of these men are quite exceptional especially taking into consideration that in their

[22] Hadžibajrić, Fejzullah. "O prevodu drugog sveska Mesnevije." p. II.

lifetimes Bosnia-Hercegovina had been physically detached from long-established centers of Islamic culture and learning. Through their efforts they succeeded in maintaining a tradition that contributed to Sarajevo's endurance as a center of Rûmî's legacy.

The glow of the *Mathnawî*'s inspiration has never been extinguished in Bosnia, even as its people were forced to endure trying hardships, ranging from Austro-Hungarian occupation, the Serb-dominated Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the monstrous bloodletting of the Second World War, the communist's hindrance of religion, and most recently the ferocious atrocities of the 1990s. Needless to say the political and social conditions that these *Mathnawî-khwâns* endured while lecturing were far from ideal. In the midst of the First World War Čaušević continued giving his lessons, and during the far more horrific Second World War Merhemić actually commenced his *Mathnawî* meetings which lasted throughout the remainder of the conflict and into the first decade and a half of the communist regime. Hadžibajrić and Hadžimulić sustained the tradition through the forty years of communist Yugoslavia, and had to deal with a government-backed *Rijaset* that was not sympathetic towards Sufism at all. It was a time when Bosnians *en masse* abandoned much of their Islamic heritage, and the old Islamic culture of Bosnia-Hercegovina was beginning to loose ground to atheism and secularism. Fejzullah Hadžibajrić never lived to see Bosnia-Hercegovina become an independent republic nor was he forced to live through the horrific siege of 1992-1995, but his successor, Halid Hadžimulić, did. To this day "Hadži Hafiz" maintains the legacy of his predecessors despite the challenges brought by the modern world in the form of pop materialism, consumerism and the breakdown of time-honored moral values. It is yet to be seen if the *Mathnawî* can rise to defy this new menace to Bosnia's cultural and spiritual identity.



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Yâ Hazret-i Mevlânâ!